



Sober Buddha

—Counseling—

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IDENTIFYING LIFE THEMES

THE LEARNING BENEFIT

Everybody grows up carrying self-esteem concepts inherited from family and peers. By learning to distinguish which of these self-perceptions are helpful and which are harmful, the addict can focus on positive actions rather than wasting time and energy trying to untangle pointless psychological issues. Most often, negative messages picked up early in life are the result of family influences and environment, not the fault of the person who grows up to experience addiction.

THE FACTS

Being psychologically immature and dependent, children introject the behavior of their parents, meaning they mistakenly assume that how they are treated is somehow deserved. If they are abused or neglected, they come to believe they deserve mistreatment rather than affection. These early beliefs persist into later childhood where entirely different traumas, unrelated to childhood events, are placed into the frame of *“I am somehow less than you and not deserving of love.”*

REVERSING NEGATIVE SELF-CONCEPTS

These negative self-perceptions can become dominant life themes that persist through adolescence into adulthood. If they are not made conscious and intentionally repaired, the themes of unworthiness and helplessness become concrete parts of the personality that are difficult to change.

These complexes operate unconsciously, below the surface of daily thinking and are difficult to understand or manage without professional help. Most people are not aware of a troublesome complex until they experience repeated psychological and emotional problems. After enough suffering, their attention is focused on resolving the conflict.

Unfortunately for the addict, substance abuse is the easiest and fastest way to numb the pain of conflicts caused by negative. The aberrant behavior caused by substance abuse only aggravates negative behavior, reinforcing the complex's core position that the person is somehow flawed as a person.

TRACING INFERIORITY

This illustration traces the development of an inferiority complex. From a man's current belief that he is a failure as a family man and provider, the illustration moves backward to the origin on the complex in childhood neglect.

- * Present age 55: Arrested for DUI, wife moves out, takes kids.
- * 50-something: *"If this is a good as it gets, it's not worth it!"*
- * 40-something: *"Some lousy family man I turned out to be!"*
- * 30-something: *"I should have gone to college. I'll never be able to achieve the American Dream."*

- * 20-somethsing: *"I wonder what I'm going to do with my life."*
- * Adolescent: *"Girls always the jocks, not nerds like me."*
- * Young Adolescent: *"I'm in the unpopular crowd."*
- * Late Childhood: *"Everybody likes my sisters more than me."*
- * Early Childhood: *"Mommy and Daddy don't care about me."*

- * Infancy
Father's industrial accident and resulting disability forced mother to work, left parents unable to pay adequate attention to boy, youngest of five siblings, all girls.

- * In vitro
Mother is stressed by unwanted pregnancy, smokes, drinks occasionally, poor dietary habits.

OVERALL LIFE THEME: "I'm not lovable or capable. Life is too hard."

THE WRITING EXERCISE

Life themes develop just like physical organisms. Like cognitive trees, they have long roots stretching from adulthood back into childhood. To help identify negative themes that may cause you anxiety and depression, leading to addictive behavior, examine your own life experience using the illustration of the neglected boy child. Write as many scenarios as you need to, examining those life situations that have been the most problematic for you.

Remember, your negative life theme is inherited and you can rewrite it.

- * Present age : " _____."
- * Recent past age : " _____."
- * Young Adulthood: " _____."
- * Adolescent: " _____."
- * Young Adolescent: " _____."
- * Late Childhood: " _____."
- * Early Childhood: " _____."
- Infancy _____
- In vitro _____

OVERALL LIFE THEME: " _____."